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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

CLASSICAL ART

FIFTH CENTURY ROOM

GEMS AND JEWELRY

III

CLASSICAL ART

Fifth century room:
Gems and jewelry

Department of Classical Art
Gallery Guide no. 3

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CLASSICAL ART.

Fifth Century Room.

Intaglio Gems.

The process of engraving intaglio designs by means of wheel and drill on hard, semi-precious stones was originally derived from Assyria. This art, like others perfected through the centuries of Minoan and Mycenaean civilization, was lost in the confusion of the Dorian "Middle Age," and did not revive until Oriental culture again reached Greece by way of Ionia in the seventh century, B. C.

Nearly all the fine, hard stones used by gem-cutters came from the Orient. Sard, chalcedony, agate and jasper were the favorites. Sard ranges in color from golden brown to deep red (specimens of deeper shade are called carnelian), and by reason of its translucency shows the design to better effect than any other stone. Chalcedony varies from pale blue to smoky brown and is generally, but not always, translucent; the most beautiful variety is light blue in color, and is called sapphirine. Agate is a stratified stone with irregular layers of different colors; onyx is the name applied to agate when the layers are regular, and sardonyx when one layer is sard. Jasper, an opaque stone, is found in several colors, - red, black, yellow and green. Rock crystal was also used. Precious stones were rarely engraved in ancient times.

From Egypt is borrowed the scarab form; the convex side of the oval stone is carved to represent the wings and head of a beetle, which rests on a low, flat base, on the under side of which is cut the design. In Greece this form continues through the fifth century B. C. The scaraboid is of similar shape, but without the beetle. The two forms are probably of unrelated origin. The cylinder, often flattened on one side, is a form borrowed from Assyria. Among earlier gems occurs the conoid, a bevelled, octagonal cone, with rounded apex and slightly convex base.

Gems were pierced for suspension, and in very early times a single engraved stone was usually strung with uncut stones or beads and worn as an amulet or ornament. They were used as seals throughout the historical period and were often mounted to turn easily on a swivel set in a loop of gold or silver. At the very beginning of the sixth century B. C., Solon by law forbade Athenian gem-cutters to keep an impression of any signet which they sold. After the end of the fifth century B. C., gems are

unpierced and are of shapes convenient for setting in rings and pendants.

(With each intaglio gem is exhibited its impression in plaster. The names Tyszkiewicz, Marlborough, etc., on the small labels accompanying some of the gems indicate former owners).

Case 4. Section 1.

Greek gems under Oriental influence. Seventh and sixth centuries, B. C.

Phoenician influence is seen in many early archaic gems, especially those found in Cyprus and Sardinia. These gems were made either by Phoenicians working in Greek lands or by Greeks seeking to please Phoenician customers.

Top Row.

1. Black stone (steatite?) scarab. Cypriote.

   A laborer with an ox ploughing. A Cypriote inscription above.

2. Green jasper scarab. Sardinian. (Phoenician).

   Two lions devouring a bull.

3. Sardonyx scarab. Phoenician.

   The stone is banded red, white and pale brown. On each side of a Phoenician ornament composed of plant forms, a winged sphinx with upturned head smells a flower, and at the same time lightly touches two other flowers with her fore-paws.

4. Green jasper scarab (in an ancient silver mount). Sardinian (Phoenician).

   A lion leaping on the back of a boar.

5. Emerald scarab (in an antique gold setting). From Cyprus.

   An Assyrian king, wearing a long embroidered garment and a high tiara, extends his sceptre in one hand and holds a weapon

over his shoulder with his other. Hair and beard are arranged in Assyrian fashion. Fine work on a hard and precious stone rarely used by ancient gem-cutters.

6. Sard scarab (set in a small ancient silver ring). Probably from Cyprus.

A lion resting among tall lotus plants, some in bud, some in blossom.

Second Row.

Graeco-Persian. Gems evidently made for Persians by Greek artists. The earlier gems of this class have purely Persian scenes. The material is generally chalcedony of bluish tint; the common forms are cylinder (early), conoid and scaraboid. They belong in date to the end of the archaic period and to the earlier part of the fifth century B. C.

1. Bluish chalcedony cylinder.

A mounted Persian shoots an arrow at a lion which leaps toward him.

2. Bluish chalcedony octagonal conoid.

A bearded centaur, with the body of a winged lion, draws his bow to drive a lion away from the carcass of a goat.

3. Bluish chalcedony scaraboid.

A mounted Persian pursuing an ibex which he has just hit with an arrow.

4. Smoky chalcedony octagonal conoid.

A king standing between two winged griffins, one male, the other female, grasps the former by one horn and stabs him. Above the king's head a winged disc.

5. Chalcedony scaraboid.

Flat side: a seated woman, draped and veiled, playing a trigonon (triangular harp); before her a spitz dog. Convex side: a woman in similar costume sits with a bird in one hand. A dwarf in a Persian coat approaches her.

Third Row.

Early Greek.

1. Rock crystal, rectangular (in an ancient silver ring).

   Bearded Triton, swimming (?). Similar figures appear in Greek sculpture of the archaic period.

2. Black jasper scaraboid.

   Mask of Medusa of archaic type.

3. Bluish chalcedony octagonal conoid.

   Winged Medusa holding a lion by the tail in each hand. Herakles walks toward her, grasping a lion with one hand and his club with the other. The posture of the figures and the working out of anatomical details are the same as in Greek sculpture at the end of the sixth century, B. C.

4. Sard scarab.

   Herakles dressed in the skin of the Nemean lion, brandishing his club and holding out his bow and arrows. Facing him a small, bearded human figure, - a suppliant, with hands outstretched in an attitude of prayer.

5. Smoky chalcedony scaraboid.

   A lion leaping on the back of a bull. In the field a tortoise and a winged disc. Archaic style.

6. Bluish chalcedony scarab.

   A lion devouring a mule. Severe style of early fifth century, B. C.

7. Yellow opaque chalcedony scaraboid.

   A winged griffin crouching.

Fourth Row.

Greek. Fifth Century B. C.

1. Yellow opaque chalcedony scaraboid.

   A winged griffin.

2. Pale yellow opaque chalcedony scaraboid.

   Snarling lion, crouching to spring.

3. Bluish chalcedony scaraboid.

   A winged griffin devouring a stag. Fine work in the free style of the fifth century B. C., on a stone of unusually beautiful color.

4. Opaque pinkish gray chalcedony scaraboid.

   A stag in flight.

5. Rock crystal scaraboid.

   A winged griffin prowling. Early fifth century, B. C.

Case 4. Section 2.

Top Row.

Greek. Fifth Century, B. C.

1. Rock crystal scaraboid.

   A galloping bull, stung on the rump by a gadfly.

2. Chalcedony scaraboid.

   A cow browsing from a small tree. A hasty sketch, but lively and true to nature.

3. Opaque yellow chalcedony scaraboid.

   Two quails.

4. Mottled gray and white stone scaraboid.

   Eagle flying with a snake.

5. Rock crystal scarab.

A dove in flight.

Second Row.

Greek. Fifth century B. C.

1. Rock crystal scaraboid.

Wild boar.

2. Sard scarab.

Head of one of the Dioskouroi (Kastor or Polydeukes).

3. Red jasper (streaked with white) scaraboid.

Danaë sits on the edge of her bed receiving in the folds of her garment the golden shower from Zeus. (Compare the silver ring with similar subject exhibited in Section 5 of this case).

4. Bluish agate cylinder, flattened on one side.

A heron with one foot raised.

5. Sard scaraboid.

A dog scratching his head with one hind paw.

Third Row.

Greek. Fifth to Fourth Century B. C.

1. Carnelian (originally a scarab; the back has been cut away).

A herm, with bearded head, identified as Hermes by the caduceus beside it.

2. Sard scaraboid (set in a modern ring).

A stag grazing.

3. Smoky crystal, circular (set in an ancient iron ring).

A bearded man seated on a stool, holding a scroll (?) in one hand and in the other a pointer, with the tip of which he touches the globe at his feet.

4. Chalcedony scaraboid (the convex portion has been cut away).

A stalk of silphium between two cranes. Inscribed , probably the name of the owner.

5. Gray, red and black jasper scaraboid.

A bearded warrior with helmet, cloak and sheathed short sword stands resting one foot on a rock, elbow on knee and chin on hand. This attitude is introduced into Greek sculpture in the Fourth Century B. C.

Three lower rows.

Etruscan scarabs. Sixth and Fifth Centuries, B. C.

The Etruscans used the scarab form exclusively, carving the beetle with much more detail than did the Greeks, and almost always ornamenting the low, flat base on which the beetle rests. On Greek scarabs the base is left plain. The favorite material for Etruscan gems is sard (and the deep red variety of sard called carnelian); sardonyx and striped agate, stratified stones with layers of contrasting colors, are not uncommon. Until the end of the fifth century B. C., the designs show the influence of Greek art, and follow its development. Etruscan gem engravers of the best period excel in composition and in successfully filling the oval field of the scarab with human figures, usually Greek heroes, in bent or crouching postures. A pronounced modelling of the muscles distinguishes Etruscan work. Inscriptions referring to the subject of the design occur frequently, but the names of artists and of owners do not appear, as on Greek gems.

Fourth Row.

1. Sard scarab.

   A warrior, fully armed, fallen on his knees, and looking up. Over a short tunic he wears a cuirass with shoulder straps. On one arm a round shield; in the other hand a short sword.

2. Sard scarab.

   A centaur with a cloak on one arm and a club over the other shoulder looks back as he moves forward.

3. Sard scarab. (Lent by Mr. Richard Norton).

   A Silenus reclining, holding out a lyre. In the field two drinking cups (a kantharos and a rhyton); below the lyre, a pine cone.

4. Sard scarab.

   A woman walking rapidly, carrying a branch in one hand and with the other holding up the hem of her long transparent garment. On the back of the beetle is carved the mask of a Silenus.

5. Agate scarab.

   A nude young warrior carrying a crested Corinthinian helmet, a shield and a spear.

6. Sard scarab.

   Herakles struggling with the Nemean lion.

Fifth Row.

1. Sardonyx (set in a modern ring).

   A youth consulting an oracle. He bends over a tablet, writing, and listens to the utterances of the head in front of him.

2. Striped agate scarab. (Lent by Mr. Richard Norton).

   Aktaion, attacked by three dogs, defends himself with a sickle-shaped knife.

3. Sard scarab. (Lent by Mr. Richard Norton).

A bearded warrior stooping over a shield; in one hand an arrow; in the other a knife. In the field behind him, a quiver.

4. Sard scarab (set in a modern ring).

Hermes, in the archaic running attitude, wearing petasos (round hat with a brim) and cloak; in one hand he carries his herald's staff (caduceus, kerykeion), in the other a necklace or wreath.

5. Sard scarab.

Herakles supporting the sky with one hand, while Atlas gathers the golden apples from a tree around which coils a three-headed serpent. Inscribed .

6. Sard scarab (set in a modern ring).

Kapaneus, transfixed with the thunderbolt of Zeus, sinks on one knee. He has dropped his sword, but still holds his shield. Kapaneus was one of the Argive chiefs who accompanied Polyneikes in the expedition of the Seven against Thebes. He boasted that even the lightning of Zeus should not prevent him from burning the city. Zeus heard the challenge, and with a bolt from heaven hurled Kapaneus from a lofty scaling ladder.

Sixth Row.

1. Sard scarab (set in a massive ancient gold ring).

A youth (Apollo?) sitting on a rock, playing a lyre.

2. Striped agate scarab.

Two warriors supporting a wounded comrade. An admirable composition.

3. Sard scarab.

A young giant hurling a huge stone. He

lets his spear fall, and rushes forward over rocky ground. On his left arm his shield and cloak. Inscribed , the giant's name (?).

4. Sard scarab. (Lent by Mr. Richard Norton).

Peleus, , washing his hair over a louter (large, shallow, circular bath basin, raised on a low pedestal). Such a basin of bronze is exhibited in a separate case in this room, and also appears on the interior of a kylix, Case 2, middle shelf.

5. Sard scarab.

A youth with a cloak rises from a chair of the graceful shape seen often on Attic grave reliefs. He holds a dog in leash; between his feet lies a stone. Water gushes from a lion's head spout near his head. Inscribed (Aktaion?).

6. Sard scarab. (Lent by Mr. Richard Norton).

A wounded warrior sinking to the ground. Inscribed

Case 4. Section 3.

Three circular gold plaques from a tomb at Neandreia, in the Troad (Asia Minor).

A row of closely spaced perforations round the circumference indicates that these discs were sewn on a garment. The embossed design was made by pressing a thin sheet of gold into a mould cut in soft stone or wood. The central rosette, the guilloche or braid pattern and the concentric circles are motives common in the Mycenaean Period; but the conventionalized palmettes, rising from volute ornaments on the largest disc show the influence of early Ionian art, and thus make it probable that these objects are not earlier than the eighth century B. C.

Two gold rosettes and a pendant of electrum.

Sphinxes, griffins and other fabulous creations of Oriental imagination were decorative forms made

familiar to Greek artists by the reëstablishment of commerce with the East during the eighth and seventh centuries B. C. Two rosettes of pale gold (at left and right), possibly from a diadem, and a pendant from an earring (in center, below) made of electrum (a natural alloy of gold and silver) are reported to have come from Kameiros in the island of Rhodes. A pattern formed by minute spheres of gold skilfully soldered to the heads of the griffins and to the petals of the rosettes illustrates a process of manipulating gold derived, perhaps, from Egypt, where it was in use as early as 1600 B. C. This granular method of decoration is employed by gold-workers of the Mycenaean Age, is developed in Greece during the earlier part of the historical period and attains inimitable perfection in the hands of Etruscan goldsmiths of the seventh and sixth centuries B. C.

Two rings of pale gold. From Etruria. Sixth Century, B. C.

Since these rings are hollow and too frail for daily wear or for use as signets, it is probable that they were made only to adorn the dead. The form of the bezel, like a cartouche, is derived directly from Egypt, where royal signets were of the same outline. Two eagles with spread wings and a sphinx wearing a pointed hat are lightly engraved in three compartments on each ring. The design is of eastern Greek origin, and the rings were probably made by Ionian goldsmiths in Etruria during the first half of the sixth century B. C.

A third ring (same section, lower left corner), of silver, solid and plated with electrum, also from Etruria, is of the same type and date, but of less careful workmanship.

The three compartments contain a sphinx, a centaur and a conventional design.

Arc of a fibula (safety-pin). From Etruria. Early Greek. (Lower righthand corner).

The material is bluish-gray talc (a variety of steatite or soapstone), the least hard of the stones used by ancient gem engravers. The end nearest the head of the fibula is decorated with a lion's skin in low relief; the rest of the surface with a conventionalized design.

Case 4. Section 4.

Twenty-three plaques of electrum. Seventh century B. C.

The thin rectangular plaques in repoussé, shown in the upper part of Section 4, are from tombs at Kameiros in Rhodes. A scarab of Psammetichos I. of Egypt (666-612 B. C.), found on the same site with similar jewellery, now in the British Museum, helps to determine the date. Such plaques were strung together to form a decoration for the breast or waist. At the top of some of them are small holes where rosettes (like those exhibited at the bottom of this section) were attached. In some instances balls were suspended by rings along the lower edge. On six of the plaques in the top row is a centaur with human forelegs holding an animal in one hand. Other plaques have figures of the winged "Oriental Artemis" grasping an animal by its tail in each hand; on others the "Bee Artemis" is shown. The heads are all of Egyptian type and wear the klaft, the characteristic Egyptian headdress.

Pear-shaped pendant of electrum, with granular decoration. Etruscan. Seventh century B. C.

Decoration distributed in four zones:

(1) Triangles; (2) men hunting stags; triangles; (3) swastikas ; (4) seven N-shaped ornaments. On the bottom, a swastika in a circle. The technique is excellent. Similar "Geometric" figures of men and animals appear on the earlier "Dipylon" grave amphora in the Archaic Room.

Fillet of electrum. From Kamerios. Seventh Century B. C.

Four pairs of holes show where rosettes, like some of those exhibited in this same section, were once attached to the band, which served as a diadem and was secured to the head of the wearer by a cord fastened in the hole at each end of the fillet.

Rosettes of electrum. From Kameiros. Seventh century B. C.

When the rosettes were fastened in position to

plaques or diadems by wire passing through holes in the centre of each, their concave side was visible, giving them the appearance of open flowers.

Case 4. Section 5.

Two spirals of electrum. Etruscan. Seventh century, B. C.

Spirals of bronze and of precious metal have been recovered in large numbers from Etruscan tombs of the seventh to the fifth centuries B. C. In Greek lands they have been found as early as Mycenaean times. Among several possible uses it is certain that in some instances they served both men and women for binding the hair.

Four gold earrings. Etruscan. Sixth Century B. C.

At the right in the top row and at the left in the third row of this section are earrings named from their form a baule, "box" type. Their use in Etruria continued from the seventh into the fifth century B. C., and was most common in the sixth century. The lace-like delicacy of the wire filigree and the extraordinary powdery fineness of the granulation on these examples show that they belong to the best period of Italian goldsmiths' work.

Gold earring. Greek. Fifth century B. C. (Second row, left). (Lent by Mrs. Samuel D. Warren).

The conventional archaic posture of the running Gorgon indicates a date early in the fifth century B. C. Although earrings of this "leech" shape are not represented on Greek vases until the end of the fifth century B. C., nor on Greek coins until the fourth century B. C., their origin is much earlier, as the technique and decoration of extant specimens attest.

Gold pin (the shaft is missing). Greek. Fifth or fourth century B. C.

Pins for the hair have been used from very early

times; in antiquity they consisted of a single shaft with a head, usually large and ornamented. The exquisitely wrought pin head, with guard chain of fine woven gold wire, is said to have been found in the Peloponnesus, but it is probably of Attic workmanship. Four lions rampant at the corners of an Ionic capital press their forepaws against a cone-shaped cluster of acanthus leaves, on the sides of which bees are resting. The power of a refined imagination has combined into unified and beautiful form these most diverse elements of architecture, and of animal, plant and insect life.

Gold pin. Greek. Fifth or fourth century B. C. (Found with the larger pin previously described).

Lions, sphinxes and bees grouped round a rose bud.

Five gold and two silver rings. Greek. Fifth and fourth centuries B. C.

Rings of solid gold are most frequent in the best Greek period (from the middle of the fifth century B. C. to the end of the fourth century B. C.), and in later Roman times. The rings exhibited in this section are of characteristic Greek type, having an almond-shaped bezel, with intaglio design. They were signets as well as ornaments of personal adornment.

Gold.

(Center).

1. A girl playing knuckle bones.

2. A Nereid riding a sea-horse; a dolphin below.

3. A lion devouring a dolphin.

(Left).

4. A cat and a cock, vis-à-vis.

5. Nikê (Victory) flying with a wreath. Snakes' heads at the juncture of bezel and hoop.

Silver.

(Lower left corner).

6. Danaë in the golden rain. The eagle of Zeus above her.
Inscribed

7. A Nereid with a shield, riding a sea-horse. (Possibly Thetis carrying the shield of Achilles).

Two gold pins. Etruscan. Sixth Century B. C.

The head of the larger pin is shaped like a pomegranate and is decorated with palmettes, circles and groups of pointed leaves left plain on a granulated ground.

An incrustation of fine granulations entirely covers the head of the smaller pin. Each of the five globules at the top is tipped with a pyramid of four minute granules.

Gold earring. Greek.

(Lower center).

The spirally wound hoop terminates at each end in a lion's head; on the neck of each a filigree pattern. The eyes of the larger head are of brown paste, inserted. On a Greek mirror-case (Fourth Century Room, Case 5) decorated with the head of a woman in relief, a similar earring appears.

Two gold earrings. Etruscan. Fifth Century B. C.

(Lower center, left and right).

These earrings are both of the "box" type (compare the four exhibited above), but do not form a pair. The one at the left is decorated with rosettes composed of spirals of fine wire; the arc of suspension is masked by the winged sphinxes in relief, couched back to back. The other earring is decorated with filigree, repoussé and spiral wire.

Six rectangular gold ornaments. From Etruria. Sixth Century B. C.

(Lower right corner).

Each is pierced with four holes for attachment. They are said to be from the same tomb as the rings of Ionic workmanship exhibited in Section 4, and the character of the design indicates an eastern Greek origin.

A pair of circular gold ornaments. From Etruria. Sixth Century B. C.

The broad, flat margin is decorated with filigree; the concave centre is a conventionalized flower, or rosette. It is more probable that these discs were ear jewels than that they served in any way as buttons (such as were used on the sleeves of Ionic dresses), or as parts of fibulae (safety-pins). They are reported to have been found with the six rectangular gold ornaments shown above them.

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